

«REVELLING IN DISSOLVING VIEWS»: CONCEPTUAL INTEGRATION AND BLENDING IN FORD'S *MISTER BOSPHORUS AND THE MUSES*

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Ford's *Mister Bosphorus and the Muses* is an extremely interesting text to analyse from a cognitive perspective. In particular, Conceptual Integration Theory seems to offer the best theoretical tools to account for its linguistic and narratological complexity: the hallucinatory techniques, dream-like transformations and metanarrative devices produce a mind-oriented text, and Blending can be fruitfully used to appreciate how voices, perspectives, characters, genres and meanings contribute to the production of impossible storytelling scenarios. The analysis of mental spaces also sheds light on the many implications triggered by the emergent structure of the blends and on the way they repeatedly differ the idea of 'understanding' the text in order to create new mental representations. Such a study also throws new light on Ford's poetic production, since it demonstrates that in fact *Mister Bosphorus* is not only an idiosyncratic work of art, but a sort of theoretical statement under the guise of poetic experimentation, which confirms Ford's paramount role as a major prose theorist but also as an accomplished modernist poet.

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As Chantler and Hawkes remind in their recent volume, Ford Madox Ford was not only one of the most influential English authors of the early twentieth century for his celebrated narrative masterpieces *The Good Soldier* (1915) and *Parade's End* (1924-1928). He was also an eclectic writer whose production ranged from novels to literary criticism, from poetry to biographies to children's stories, even though only at the end of the twentieth century did he receive the attention he merited. Today his texts and «roles as an editor and mentor are increasingly receiving the recognition they deserve» (Chantler, Hawkes, 2016, p. 1); so much so that Skinner even claims that such a perplexing and idiosyncratic text as *Mister Bosphorus and the Muses* (Ford, 1923), henceforth *MrB* was not a curious and extravagant work of art but «responded to both T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) and Pound's early cantos. It highlighted and exaggerated the formal features of the leading modernists' work, including Joyce's *Ulysses*» (Skinner, 2016, p. 118).

In a letter to Joseph Conrad (8th November 1923), Ford himself ironically called *MrB* his «*Dunciad*» but did not believe «the intention will be obvious to the general reader» (Ludwig, 1965 p. 157). In fact, Ford's intention was probably not obvious to the specialist reader either, since as early as 25th November 1922 he had described *MrB* to Edgar Jepson as «an immense Poem [which] will, I fancy, annoy quite a number of people» (Ludwig, 1965, p. 143). It is not surprising, then, that *MrB* has been widely ignored by the critics who have usually disposed of it as an experimental piece of writing.

After several decades of almost universal neglect, Wiesenfarth (1991, p. 110) praised *MrB* arguing that it «explores the subject of *A Portrait of the Artist* in the style of *Ulysses*» and McDonough (2004, p. 161), too, considered *MrB* a modernist work which «applies some of the techniques of *Ulysses* to poetry», even if his analysis was basically limited to a discussion of the plot and the general features of the text. Edwards (2005, p. 95), reassessed the experimental character of the text and

contended that *MrB* «might be viewed as a text which looks backwards: Ford's *Last of England* rather than a text opening new perspectives». In his opinion, *MrB* would amount to a «City burlesque» whose theatrical effects offer a «successful antidote to paranoia» (p. 103), an attempt to make «his City “unreal” in order to escape the intensity of its imaginative hold upon his life» (p. 107). Saunders (2016, p. 19) presents *MrB* as an «extraordinary experimental pastiche poem», with deep biographical resonances, such as the allegorical presentation of the poet's decision to leave England forever, while Davies emphasizes the broad cultural affiliations which characterize what he considers a very aristophanic text, and suggests that *MrB* should be read not in its relations with history but with «other modernist visions of historical sequence and countersequence» (2016, p. 110) manipulating or playing with the fluidity of identity and form, such as Woolf's *Orlando* or Joyce's *Ulysses*.

All these critical insights agree on the experimental and metamorphic nature of *MrB* but typically define it on a rather impressionistic basis. This article will then consider Ford's text from a different perspective, using the theoretical tools of Cognitive Stylistics (see Stockwell, 2002; Brandt, Brandt, 2005; Burke, 2006, 2010), in order to verify (or revise) those critical hypotheses in a more objective way. More specifically, Conceptual Integration Theory will be the main theoretical framework for this study, because by focusing «on the mechanism of the emergence of meaning» (Dancygier, 2012, p. 1) it can account for «the centrality of meaning negotiation to any meaning-emergence processes» (p. 5), thus providing a perfect framework to evaluate the sophisticated enunciatinal structure of *MrB*.

An analysis based on the cognitive framework of Conceptual Integration Theory, however, demonstrates that *MrB* is not just an idiosyncratic or experimental work of art, but has also important theoretical bearings. The apparently chaotic bundle of stylistic features and narrative perspectives in the text exposes the ideological constructedness of certain traditional narrative models. In fact, *MrB*'s linguistic and narratological complexity can be considered as an attempt to naturalize an 'unnatural' storytelling into familiar models (see Fludernik, 1996), but at the same time to disrupt and question the very idea of familiarity of those models.

Moreover, under the guise of a frivolous *divertissement*, Ford puts forward a manifold piece of writing whose elusive nature questions the idea of 'understanding' a text which can no more offer a realistic representation of the world, but rather presents the real chaos of the world: as a matter of fact, the seething multiplicity of voices, perspectives, characters, genres, and meanings gets the reader to accept the distortion of established models, the construction of impossible narrative scenarios, and the presence of a language at its most polyphonic and polysemous. This confirms Ford's paramount role as a major prose theorist but also as an accomplished modernist poet, perfectly in tune with

Pound's idea that modern artists should renovate the cultural scene at all levels (a concept summarized by his famous invitation to «Make it new!»).

The article will first highlight some aspects of Conceptual Integration Theory that are particularly relevant for the present analysis, then it will focus on *MrB*'s construction and manipulation of mental constructs which not only influence the stylistic structure of the narrative, but also give the text its peculiar theoretical implicatures.

I.

Cognitive studies have been profitably employed by pragmaticians and stylisticians in text analysis to demonstrate how linguistic forms are indicative of underlying cognitive processes and structures in text. Such seminal works on Conceptual Metaphor Theory as Ortony (1979), Lakoff and Johnson (1980), and Lakoff and Turner (1989), for example, have long been providing a 'natural' cognitive approach to metaphors, which can be studied in terms of abstract concepts structured and understood through models projected from concrete source domains.

However, Conceptual Metaphor studies cannot fully explain how the mappings between the two domains give rise to new, richer constructs from a semantic point of view. Conceptual Integration Theory, or Blending Theory, is a particularly helpful theoretical tool to overcome this shortcoming, since it can account not only for the achievement of ideological and conceptual coherence in a text, but also for the production of new meanings in the form of emergent structures. In particular, as Coulson (2001), Fauconnier and Turner (2002), Semino and Culpeper (2002) and Dancygier (2005, 2012) amply demonstrated, Blending contributes in important ways to the argumentative and inferential aspects of a text, accounting for the interplay of narrative levels and highlighting the emergence of new meanings.

Conceptual Integration Theory is «an expanded model of accounting for metaphorical transfers» and as such «has become a familiar tool in literary and linguistic criticism» (Fludernik, 2015, p. 160). It basically relies on the idea that the combination of pre-existing mental «packets» of meaning, as Turner defined them (2002, p. 10), in a set of mental operations gives rise to dynamic and temporary cognitive structures, called mental spaces, which can be organized and studied through a Conceptual Integration Network. A blend relies on the notion of a generic space, a sort of skeletal construct which determines the possibility and the structure of cross-space mappings between two or more independent conceptual constructs, called input spaces. Even though the shared structure and the degree of similarity between the input spaces may vary significantly, elements of the input spaces are selectively projected into a new mental space, the blended space, which does not simply fuse the existing elements, but engenders a new emergent structure.

Blends mainly rely on the 'compression' into a single mental space of some elements that were independent in the input spaces, or on the 'decompression' of unified concepts which are expanded and then rearranged into a new concept. These fundamental operations help clarify, enrich, or problematize the meaning of the relations among the concepts in the network. Conceptual Integration, however, does not simply require a process of composition, i.e. the projection and fusion of elements from the input spaces into the blended space. The new scenario is usually completed by the introduction of supplementary notions which are normally associated to the projected elements, and it is even possible to elaborate those notions by imagining scenarios «which unfold along various possible trajectories» (Grady *et alii*, 1999, p. 107). This means that the new mental representations and conceptualizations produced by the blend can account for the mapping operations that underlie the creation of any scenario, thus explaining how new meanings which were not available in any of the inputs are generated and confirming that «proliferations of meaning arising from the source domain are in fact unlimited» (Fludernik, 2010, p. 11).

More importantly, however, the idiosyncratic configuration of each mental space reflects the projection of specific attitudinal meanings, reinforcing (or questioning) the established truths of a society or a specific cultural *milieu*. This special form of ideological 'exposure' is certainly tied to the contextual and intertextual aspects of the text, but it also stems from the fact that in blends the construction of meaning is strictly tied to the configurations of mental spaces and, ultimately, to the writer's perspective. Therefore, blends perform a crucial role in exposing the inherent ideological dimension of the construction of the emotional, ideological or evaluative perspectives of a text: as Dancygier puts it (2005, p. 111), since a mental space «is an *ad hoc* mental structure allowing for some understanding of a situation, then it is naturally also a locus of viewpoint».

Due to these characteristics, the cognitive approach of Conceptual Integration Theory seems perfectly suited to appreciate the stylistic sophistication of *MrB* and appraise those narratological issues in which the construction of meaning relies on creative configurations of mental spaces and points of view.

II.

MrB is presented as A SHORT HISTORY OF POETRY IN BRITAIN under the guise of a VARIETY ENTERTAINMENT IN FOUR ACTS (Ford, 1923a, p. 532). Act I sets the scene by presenting Bosphorus as a disillusioned and restless poet who has lost his touch with poetry, is experiencing economic distress and is desperately looking for inspiration. He describes himself as a «rotten poet» (p. 541) who is trying to get rid of «*The Great Tradition n the Middle Class!*» (p. 548) – a legacy which is extolled by his former patroness, the Northern Muse, but which stimulates in him not an

afflatus but only «the right flatulence» (p. 548). At a thematic level, then, *MrB* deals with the same problems and tensions which were at the centre of the modernist cultural debate, such as the role of the poet and his anxious relationship with tradition, the lack of affinity with the philosophical mainstay of the Victorian Age, the pressures that economic constraints impose on creative life, and so on.

What is particularly interesting, however, is the way all these elements are rendered linguistically, exploiting the whole gamut of stylistic variety. A characteristic which immediately attracts the reader's attention is the perpetual state of metamorphosis which features prominently in the text at all levels. All transformations and changings are typically partial and temporary, ironically flexible, easily reversible within a couple of lines. Most significantly, these metamorphoses affect the linguistic realization of the text. The Muse who appears several times in the first scene, for instance, is presented as a character but, more importantly, as a sound producing a series of hypostatizations based on rhymes or homophones: the first pages of the text include «Funeral yews» (p. 532), «chapel pews» (p. 533), a «pub in the Meadows» (p. 537), and the poet's «stiffened thews» (p. 539). This aural play builds up a sort of phonetic net which ironically imposes transformation as the main feature of the text just when the text itself is attacking «accustomed rhymes» (p. 535).

A similar effect is produced by the casual reference to the nine Muses as mental representations or implausible characters who only share their number: Bosphorus addresses the «happy Nine [who] soon shall dry-nurse. Nine young, blameless poets [...] and the ninth part of my Muse to inspire each pen» (p. 546); Pauper Bulfin is «split into nine» (p. 558) while the Muse is «opprest / By's ninefold pen» (p. 557). In Act II, Scene II, the stage direction informs of the appearance on the forestage of «NINE BULFINS *as male Chorus*», followed by «ATHIS, *Ninefold, as Female Chorus*» (p. 562). Athis herself foregrounds number nine in her anaphoric repetition: «As when summers dry with drought to thirst; / As when nine lambs ad for rich-cream'd milk / As when nine maidens feel of love the first; / As when nine Goddess-Venus of that ilk / In forward loves are untowardly curst, / Melting in tears then gan we thus lament» (p. 572). After the Harlequinade in Scene III, nine young gentlemen appear and «dance gracefully across stage» (p. 601); lastly, at the end of the text the Muses become «NINE FAINT VOICES» (p. 612).

The importance of this series of transformations can hardly be overemphasized, not only because they contribute to setting *MrB* in tune with the ideological context of modernism in which the idea of synaesthetically hearing «all kinds of words changing colour» (Joyce, 1986, p. 526) featured prominently, but also because these changes acquire a special relevance if they are read in the light of Blending Theory. The mental spaces set up by the various manifestations of the Muses invite the reader to 'run the blend' and produce new mental configurations which could not come

from the input spaces alone. At the same time, elaborating the potential implicatures emerging from the blended space and the attitudinal meanings projected by the text itself, the new structure originating in the blend retroactively influences the meaning of the inputs. Therefore, while the input space of the Muses stays the same, the other input spaces constantly add to the blend, which presents an unwonted mental image of the Muse-as critic, the Muse-as-gentleman, the Muse-as-poet, and even the Muse-as-voice, not to mention the Muse-as-fragmentation («the ninth part of my Muse», p. 546) or the very modernist Muse-inspired-by-poets («Great poets three times three to inflame their Muse!», p. 568). The mental process triggered by these mappings results in the creation of a blended space which questions the very idea of poetic inspiration, since the Muses as the mythological figures presiding over all the arts are 'seen' and presented as radically different figures, their identity enriched by distortion.

Within the whole range of characters and their transformations, Bosphorus obviously plays a major role, and Blending is particularly helpful not only for analysing the features of mental space configurations in the construction of his viewpoint, but to account for the ways his identity is presented more as a temporary condition than a permanent state. Early in the narrative, for example, Bosphorus is shown through a cinematographic close-up and, while he is writing, «the words, projected by a cinematograph machine, are thrown on black cloth» (p. 544). In this quick transition from external objective perspective to point-of-view shot, the same words that Bosphorus writes and sees on his page are projected unbeknown to him, so that the reader can see exactly what Bosphorus sees (the same happens shortly after, p. 548). In other words, Bosphorus is both the object and the subject of perception in a very peculiar kind of blended focalization: while in a film or in a traditional narrative we usually move from external to internal perspectives or vice versa, here both perspectives are presented at the same time, so that the reader sees that Bosphorus writes but also what he writes. The whole scene is thus a blend of external and internal perspectives which are displayed simultaneously in what could be considered Ford's flippant version of the most extreme modernist narrative experiments.

Act II is imbued with blends, with the scene initially set in present day but also in the XVIII, XX, VII, XIV, XVI centuries, even in «V century b.C. and many others» (p. 551). Places, too, are multiple («Any workhouse» but also «Twickenham-Athens, Scandinavia, Meads outside Westminster, Painted Gallery at Greenwich, Athens and many other places», p. 551), and the stage directions also point out that there is yet another narrative place («ON SCREEN: *Clerkenwell*»). In fact, the text only gives sporadic, generic clues as to the time and place of the action, and it is not even clear whether times and places follow one upon the other, or overlap, or happen simultaneously. It is

clear, thus, that spatio-temporal coordinates are useless, or they are listed only to give an illusion of coherence which will soon be disrupted.

Scene I, for example, begins with the opening credits of a film «From / Birth-place / to / Museum / How / Poets live / FIG / ring Mr. BOSPHORUS and / MUSA POORE / (Rotten Films Ltd)» (p. 552), while on the fore-stage Mr. Bosphorus is with «An aged pauper-Bulfin by name». The reader, thus, is once again in front of a double narrative level: what is shown on the screen and what happens on stage. This double level is underscored by the unwitting Bulfin, who is unable to understand the real nature of the images he sees on the wall («What's the matter with the master's wall? / Who's been painting on the master's wall», p. 553). The same happens shortly after, when the words «THE POET VISITS HIS BIRTHPLACE» appear on screen: Bulfin thinks they are writings on the wall, unable to distinguish the difference between the reality he lives in and the fictional reality on the screen.

Bosphorus makes things worse, because in his comment («A prison there are no bars in / Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin!», p. 553), he refers to the well-known biblical episode in the fifth chapter of the *Book of Daniel*, with the apparition of the ominous inscription on the wall during King Belshazzar's banquet. Unlike the prophet, however, Bosphorus does not provide any interpretation of the message («There ain't no writin there at all! / To be no more missed from the familiar hall! / To be no more tantalized by cup and ball / In the hands of fate. No rise: no fall! / Not any more at all!»), thus adding to the general uncertainty of the text. Then the screen shows a London street in a poor quarter with two shops, a pawnbroker's and an undertaker's, and when «the film shifts [...] the undertaker's [establishment] seems to jump, rather unsteadily, at the spectator», Bulfin is again unable to distinguish between reality levels and is frightened («Gorblimey! Cawfins! Cawfins jumpin at me!»), but Bosphorus reassures him since «These are a poet's dreamings!» (p. 554).

In this frantic sequence of events, the compression of chronotopic elements and narrative perspectives is virtually impossible to unpack, since the text mixes times and places, virtual and 'true' reality, only to make things even more ambiguous and leave the reader uncertain as to the real nature of what he is reading. The natural reaction would be to ask if there is a real film or if it is just a ploy to represent the poet's oneiric world, what the status of the events presented in the text really is, if they are just «poet's dreamings» or if they happen in a different narrative plan. And if the reader is just 'watching' Bosphorus's dreams, is the poet's mind one of the 'many other' places the scene is set in, or are the various places and epochs mentioned at the beginning of the scene just Bosphorus's contrivances?

This phantasmagoria can be simply defined as an experimental piece of writing to puzzle the reader, but if it is read from the perspective of Blending it acquires very different implications:

merging imagination and reality, or different narrative levels, does not make the story odd, but adds vividness and humour to it. Bosphorus's dreaming mind acts as the generic space which makes all these mappings possible, even though the text does not make clear the scope of his dreaming. The screen, Bosphorus, Bulfin, the biblical *Book of Daniel* all act as input spaces, allowing various cross-space mappings in the Blending Network. The allusion to the undecipherable inscription in the *Book of Daniel*, for instance, extends the problem of ambiguity to the whole text, with a further mapping based on the disanalogy between Daniel (who gave the right interpretation to the writing on the wall to King Belshazzar) and Bosphorus (who does not give any). More importantly, however, the blended space selectively fuses characters and events that belong to chronological, spatial, even ontologically different levels, granting the coexistence of the 'fictional' Bosphorus in the film and the 'real' Bosphorus who watches it. The construction of such a blend in a way literalizes the difficult process of self-discovery of the artist and his role, because the story is presented from the three joint viewpoints of the external narrator, Bosphorus as 'real' character in the narrative and Bosphorus as 'fictional' character on the screen. In this way, the main narrative space of the «VARIETY ENTERTAINMENT IN FOUR ACTS» remains and retains its global narrative function, but the blended spaces repeatedly alter it, making new viewpoints simultaneously available and blurring the distinctions between fact and fiction, thus problematizing the very idea of narratorial hierarchy. After all, Act II is aptly concluded by Cerberus, the mythological three-headed monster whose voice is inherently polyphonic.

The poet's imaginative powers (or better their parody) are also the basis of another Blending Network which is activated shortly after: while talking to Bosphorus, Bulfin feels he is changing and Bosphorus informs him «You are changed! / You have become a Critic!» (p. 557). Despite Bulfin's protestation, who says he cannot write and not even read, Bosphorus reassures him that he will «do quite well when I have split you up / For the performance of your several functions». Bulfin is then actually split into nine to perform the role imposed on him «By right of the Poet. You exist by me.» (p. 558) and then condemned to go «Down thro' the whispering halls of the To Be!» (p. 559). Under the generic space made up by the poet's prerogatives, the input spaces of the ignorant and poor Bulfin, the literary critic, and the Muses are mapped onto the blend to give rise to an ironically monstrous creature, a ninefold ignorant critic. Thus, the emerging structure of this blended space not only reassesses and deflates the figure of the literary critic; it further demythologizes the role of the Muses, and it even deconstructs the idea of essence, the epistemological foundation of identity: despite its graphological foregrounding with capital letters, the verb «To Be» does not give any idea of permanence, but is surprisingly associated to the voluble and ephemeral sound of «whispering halls», thus presenting dislocation as the fundamental condition of the text as a whole.

The best example of how Conceptual Integration not only yields new meanings but also helps a sort of mental reorientation in the mind of the reader is provided by the flamboyant Act IV, which includes a harlequinade and a transformation scene, once again set in very ambiguous chronotopic frame (time, for example, is «MCMLX odd, as in preceding Act. Afterwards: Eternity», p. 590; the scene shifts from the «road to Elysium», to a Street in Clerkenwell, from the poet's Corner in Westminster Abbey to «Elysium, near Parnassus»). After two short introductory scenes, Scene III features «VOICES alone of BOSPHORUS and SOUTHERN MUSE. Apparent to AUDIENCE ALONE: ARLEQUIN» (p. 593). The curious clarification that Arlequin is visible only to the audience implies that the characters' voices on stage are, in a way, presented as actual characters. This is confirmed when shortly afterwards, the voice of Bosphorus is transformed into the «VOICE OF PANTALOO-N-BOSPHORUS (*his lips do not move*)» (p. 597). Not only does this mysterious voice have lips which do not move; after just a dozen lines its speech is interrupted, the voice loses its former physical hypostatisation and, in yet another blending process, it becomes part of hybrid figure: «VOICE OF PANTALOO-N-BOSPHORUS; DO OF COLUMBINE-SOUTHERN MUSE».

Sometimes, in this hectic pace of transformations and recreations, the characters seem to temporarily retrieve their 'identity', but their actions or words border on insanity: «Whilst talking, COLUMBINE-SOUTHERN MUSE is executing *vols-de-piscon* round the whole circumference of the stage, PANTALOO-N-BOSPHORUS hobbling after her, extending walking-stick and mumbling: "Ga-ga! Ga-ga!!!"» (pp. 597-598). Then, shortly afterwards, the 'Voices' once again take the characters' place as main actors on the stage, thus inviting the reader to build a peculiar mental space with impossible scenarios in which ironical inversion is the norm: voices become characters, characters themselves are blended with the classical characters of the *Commedia dell'arte* or are transformed in some other ways: the Northern Muse appears as a Duchess; the Labour Master is the chauffeur of a Rolls-Royce; Pauper Bulfin even undergoes a double transformation and, after he had become convict 64209 in Act III, he is now «PAUPER 64209 as MISTER BULFIN» (p. 595).

In a way, this frantic sequence of changes and metamorphoses can be considered as the quintessential quality of the text, but its analysis from the perspective of Conceptual Integration highlights other ideological issues generated by this process of metaphoric fusion. When the Voice of Bosphorus wonders «Why waste we time on this buffoonery» (p. 599), the Voice of Columbine-Southern Muse replies: «It is the cock: / It is the cock we owe. [...] / You see the Public / Expect it of us: we must pay our way / Into Elysium more than other folk / Who lack our conscience as our recompense, / Being the cock we owe to Aesculapius». The Southern Muse apparently justifies the humorous nature of the situation as the logical consequence of the light entertainment they are expected to give to the public. However, in the ensuing Conceptual Integration Network, the blended

space is produced by the mapping of two very different input spaces, both of which feature the same animal: the cock as the animal traditionally associated to a silly, ridiculous story and the cock as the animal traditionally sacrificed to the Greek god of medicine, Aesculapius/Asclepius, to thank him for the recovery from an illness. The latter mental space, however, inevitably triggers a process of completion of the projected element, since, according to Plato's *Phaedo*, «we owe the cock to Asclepius» were Socrates' enigmatic last words to one of his disciples. In the new scenario which emerges from the blend, the ironic, playful dimension of the text coexists with the dramatic event of the death of the philosopher, traditionally considered the wisest of man because he acknowledged the limits of his knowledge. Shocking as it may be, the compresence of such opposites as laughter and tragedy, life and death, irony and seriousness fits perfectly in a funny, raucous piece of writing, in which a mystifying character (herself a blend originated by the fusion of a Muse, a Voice and Columbine) presents the text itself as an animal whose double 'identity' is mapped onto the blend.

Unsurprisingly, Bosphorus' death, which will happen shortly afterwards, will have similarly hilarious features: Bullin (by now become a Clown Critic) smites him on the head with a bladder and Bosphorus dies, but then the «ROLIS-ROYCE with a solemn vindictiveness executes a passeul on his prostrate corpse. He is picked up by UNDERTAKER, a perfectly flattened figure, rolled up and placed in ornamental coffin standing outside the shop» (p. 607). Bosphorus' solemn burying in the Poet's Corner in Westminster Abbey is emblematically presented as a «TRANSFORMATION SCENE» and accordingly the priest who is conducting the funeral service is «UNDERTAKER in costume of Dean of Westminster». The funeral sermon, too, has ambiguous traits, since the Dean's laudatory words are interspersed with the sound of Various Electrical Apparatus which (who?) repeatedly comment on his words in their own mysterious language: «Buzz-a-buzz! Buzz! Buzz!» (p. 607), «Wuck, Wuck-wuck-wuck-wuck-Wucky! Wuck!!» (p. 608). Just as in the 'Aeolus' chapter of Joyce's *Ulysses*, where «Everything speaks in its own way» (Joyce, 1986, p. 100), in *MrB* voices or apparatus become characters with their own peculiar features and their own secret language.

From the point of view of Conceptual Integration, the funeral ceremony makes up the generic space which contains the whole scene, while Undertaker, the Dean of Westminster, and the Various Apparatus contribute, as input spaces, to the paradoxical blended space. Undertaker, for example, would be a perfectly fit character in a funeral, but the features that are mapped onto the blended space are not the ones we would normally expect, since he appears not as Undertaker but as the preaching Dean. Likewise, the elements from the Various Apparatus which are mapped on the blend are, amazingly, their 'words', not their more predictable functions as lights or amplifiers. Once again, the emergent structure denies a simplistic reduction of the text to a bizarre chaos of incoherent elements. In his intolerably rhetorical speech, the Dean celebrates Bosphorus as a poet who «stood / Most high!

I am assured by Mr Bulfin—» (p. 609). His speech is suddenly interrupted by a last outpouring of comments («Wuck Wuck! Wuck! Sizzle! Sizzle! Siz. Click-Click-Click-Click!») and then continues just like that: «And sure no heart more truthful ever spoke / The deep-toned words of wiseness». As a consequence, the final praise of Bosphorus is pronounced by a character in disguise (Undertaker as the Dean), who turns to Bulfin (a former illiterate pauper) as knowledgeable critic who should be speaking the «deep-toned words of wiseness». However, due to the unforeseen insertion of the Various Apparatus's 'words', the Dean inadvertently asserts that the aphasic, meaningless sounds of the machines are the real «deep-toned words of wiseness».

III.

In a short note added to the end of the excerpt published in «The Chapbook» (corresponding to Act I, Scene 7 of *MrB*, Ford (1923b, p. 23) commented on his text:

NOTE BY THE AUTHOR: — *The editor asks for an explanation of this work. Surely, he underestimates the intelligence of his readers, for what could be plainer? An English poet here looks at the world. Any English POET!*

Argument and the editor apart, it may be suggested to the Indulgent Reader that He will get more from the poem if He takes, without seeking explanations, what He gets, revelling merely in dissolving views. Your poet is an inconsequential creature...

It would be imprudent to take Ford's ironical words at face value, but certainly his warning against looking for explanations is an important key to the appreciation of *MrB*.

The text is explicitly presented as a multi-layered composition of dissolving effects, and its stylistic features impose linguistic contamination, taste for quotations and allusions, syncretistic and parodic co-presence of heterogeneous elements as the dominant element of the text. Language is freely used as a malleable instrument at complete disposal of the writer, who makes the most of its polysemic nature and its aural echoes to highlight the impossible task of representing the multifarious richness of an individual experience. At the same time, blends integrate the spaces inhabited by the different characters and situations in the input spaces, thereby underscoring the relativity of point of view: the main narrative space of *MrB* is extended over the narrative spaces of other stories, other events and other characters, so that Bosphorus's experience gradually appears as only one of the many perspectives involved. Even the different temporal and spatial spaces are compressed, decompressed and mapped onto unpredictable sequential orders, blurring the chronotopic frame of the events. This bold and asystematic combination of styles and genres, which basically undermines the idea of permanence, also manipulates and destabilizes the narrative viewpoint, investing the reader with great hermeneutic responsibility. However, the persistent decompressions and re-aggregations of characters, identities, and events inevitably increase the reader's difficulty in following the story,

since in any scene the memory of what happened before in the text contradicts what is shown in the present.

The whole point of exploiting such metamorphic and perplexing features in the narrative seems to be the imposition of a different ideological perspective onto otherwise familiar characters and tenets. Seeing things differently is the consequence of blending one's reality space with other mental spaces: what is typical in *MrB*, however, is that the changes of opinions, perspectives, and interpretations in the perceiving subject are presented as changes in the characters and objects themselves. In other words, the setting up of new mental spaces allows the writer to introduce and maintain his own experiential viewpoint together with other viewpoints, modifying the story by constantly changing the perspective from which it is told. In this way, the text discusses such hotly debated modernist topics as the nature of poetry, or the role and the identity of the writer, by literally multiplying and blending characters and situations in incredibly multifaceted scenarios.

Conceptual Integration Theory seems to offer a powerful tool to account for these peculiar stylistic features, allowing the reader to appreciate the various hermeneutic levels of the text and the close correlation between its conceptual networks and its perspectivizing strategy. In particular, the analysis of mental spaces sheds light on the idiosyncratic narrative construction of *MrB*, adds to the existing theoretical apparatus by yielding interesting interpretative insights, but more importantly highlights the way the text broadens the spectrum of meaning construction by producing original and unpredictable narrative possibilities.

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